

College tackles plagiarism

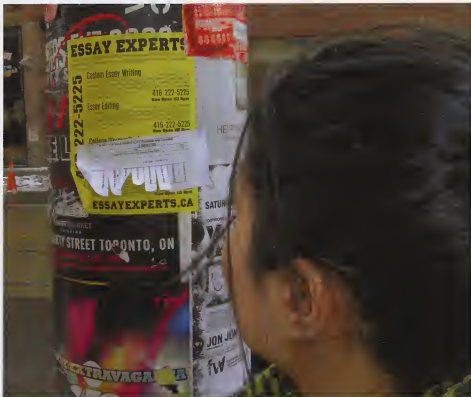
George Brown is preparing to tackle the persistent problem of academic integrity with a fresh approach.

It has issued a discussion paper sponsored by the office of Academic Vice President Michael Cooke and written by former Health Sciences chair Paula Price. The paper, which will be posted on Insite, reviews the situation at George Brown as well current research and approaches to academic integrity – which Price says is a complex issue requiring a thoughtful response.

For instance, Price cites research that suggests that many students inadvertently run afoul of plagiarism policies because they've never been properly taught and don't understand the principles of academic integrity and how to properly attribute of the work of others. Another study found some professors become aware of academic dishonesty but choose not to pursue the issue with students.

Web-based solutions, such as the widely used Turnitin.com, aren't magic bullets by any means either, she says. They aren't foolproof and create thorny issues of privacy and copyright. Price suggests simple policies and process as well as education for faculty and students are needed. She concludes her paper with the following six recommendations:

- Review existing policies, agree on the policy intent, and ensure that the policies provide clear descriptions of what constitutes academic integrity and academic dishonesty.
- Create processes that are simple and easy for faculty to implement when responding to issues of suspected academic dishonesty.
- Provide faculty with educational opportunities to learn about what constitutes academic dishonesty and how to engage students in ongoing discussions about academic dishonesty.
- Provide students with educational resources and opportunities to learn about what constitutes academic dishonesty, and opportunities to engage in ongoing discussions with faculty about academic dishonesty.
- Approach academic dishonesty from an academic integrity perspective with prevention and learning as a focus rather than a punitive perspective: teach students how to manage sources; emphasize good writing (drafting, revising, editing);



A George Brown student looks at an ad from a ready-made essay service – just outside the St. James campus front doors. Now the college is preparing to tackling the issue of academic integrity and has issued a discussion paper on the subject.

- student skills (time management, asking for help); distinguish between deliberate cheating and writing mistakes.
- Design assignments to mitigate against plagiarism.

Cooke says he hopes Price's paper will prompt a college-wide debate that result in a more effective approach to academic integrity. "The issue is real...and the paper begs discussion and reflection. I don't think there's a single solution."

While the extent of cheating is hard to determine, a 2006 University of Guelph study involving 13,000 university students suggests it's widespread. It found that more than half students surveyed admitted to cheating on written work.

Plagiarism isn't new at the college. George Brown's Academic Dishonesty Policy, contained in the

college's Code of Student Conduct revised last in 2001, calls for failing grades for students who cheat and filing of Academic Discipline Reports, which sit in student files for three years after graduation.

At George Brown there have been only two academic appeals by students who got failing grades for plagiarism since 2000. But the lack of statistics may be disguising a problem that affects a large number of students and virtually all professors and teachers. One department has tried to fight cheating by using a web service that compares student work to a database of existing academic work, while another is incorporating a web-based tutorial about plagiarism in its programs.

But the effectiveness of current the college's policy, penalties and approach is called into question by some staff and students.

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Leading hotelier and alumnus is living Canadian dream

For Minaz Abji, it all started at George Brown in 1975.

His family had arrived in Canada a few years earlier as refugees from Africa with only \$50. Then Minaz decided to enrol in a hotel management program at George Brown. That's where he met the woman he would marry and launched a successful career that has taken him to the top of the hotel business. Today he is responsible for more than \$10 billion in worldwide hotel assets for Host Hotels and Resorts.

Abji will share his experience with current George Brown students and staff on Jan. 27 in a presentation called *The Power of Possibilities: Living the Canadian dream!*

Born in Uganda, Minaz was forced to leave with his family in 1972 when Dictator Idi Amin exiled 50,000 citizens of Indian and Asian descent, seizing their property and money, and giving them 90 days to leave the country. Determined to pursue his goal of working in the hotel industry, Minaz enrolled in Hotel Administration at George Brown, winning scholarships and applying for student loans to get through.

After graduation, he was hired by Westin Hotels where he worked for 23 years, gaining experience

in all aspects of hotel operations and working his way up in the organization. Minaz joined Host Hotels and Resorts (formerly Host Marriott) in 2003.

He is Executive Vice President of the Fortune 500 lodging real estate company that operates 123 upscale and luxury full-service hotel properties primarily operated under Marriott, Ritz-Carlton, Four Seasons, Hyatt, Hilton and Swissôtel brand names. Abji is responsible for the leadership of the Asset Management, Feasibility, Design and Construction and Revenue Management Departments.

"George Brown College was very good for me," he says. "I had great instructors and mentors who really challenged me." Abji says his time at George Brown was also important because it was where he met his wife, who was also a student in the Hotel Administration program. The couple have three children, aged 27, 20 and 19.

The presentation, which is sponsored by the Alumni Department and preceded by a continental breakfast, starts at 8 a.m. at the Marriott Downtown Eaton Centre Hotel (525 Bay St. at Dundas). Tickets are \$10 and are available in the alumni section of college's website.



Minaz Abji, a graduate of George Brown's Hotel Management program, both met his wife and launched his successful career at the college. He will speak to current students on Jan. 27.



MARKETING STUDENTS BRING HOME GOLD –

A team of 14 George Brown marketing students won two gold and two silver medals in the Ontario Colleges Marketing Competition hosted by Niagara College in Niagara Falls on Nov 13 and 14. The medals – Gold in Quiz Bowl and the Sales Management Case and Silver in Retail and Marketing cases – put the team in 5th place among 15 participating colleges. The team of 14 prepared for the competition in a special course, *Case Based Approach to Marketing Strategy*, led by Professor Margery Taylor. They also spend a lot of time in coaching and practice sessions outside of class time with volunteer coaches. The students on the team are Kira Berry, Alyssa Roane, Billy-Joe Buttery, Stephanie Joseph-Flatts, Doug Cooper, Ashley McCaman, James Gaby, Valerie McDonald, Matt Grabias, Graham Read, Rebecca Korzenstein, Daniel Snow, Astro Prah and Jeff Cheng.



SENIOR'S ASSOCIATION VOLUNTEER HONOURED WITH AWARDS

In December three Activation Co-ordinator/Gerontology students were the first ever recipients of \$500 Toby Isaacs Endowment Awards, which honour the long-time George Brown Seniors Association volunteer. On hand were (from left) Health Sciences and Community Services Dean Lorie Schekter-Wolfson, student recipients Laura Ciarrella, Angela Rogers, Stephanie Rebello, and Toby's son Paul Isaacs. In a tribute, Schekter-Wolfson said Toby Isaacs was a key Association executive. "Toby's energy made mine pale in comparison." The Association provides educational programs for its 600 members.

Part-time academic staff vote on union February 5



Part-time teacher Nicole Dimson helps second year Graphic Design student David Perez with a project. Dimson, who has been teaching at George Brown on a part-time basis for 10 years, is one of hundreds of part-time academic staff at the college who will vote whether to join a union in a vote on Feb. 5.

Part-time and sessional teachers, counsellors and librarians at Ontario colleges will have the opportunity to vote on whether or not they want to be represented by a union for the first time. The vote will take place at George Brown on Feb. 5, but eligible staff can cast a vote at any college in the province during a travelling poll period that starts Jan. 19.

Full-time Ontario college academic and support staff are currently represented provincially by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), which is the same union managing the vote for the part-time academic staff.

The ballot will ask: "In your employment relations with your employer do you wish to be represented by a union?"

Staff eligible to vote are:

- Part-time teachers who teach for six hours or less per week, including teachers in continuing education;
- Teachers hired on sessional contracts;
- Counsellors or librarians employed on a part-time or sessional basis;

- The aforementioned staff who were employed by the college anytime between December 2, 2008 and the date of the vote.

Academic staff who believe they are entitled to vote, but whose names do not appear on the voters list, are being asked to vote anyway. Their eligibility will be determined after the voting is completed. The province-wide voting period will begin Jan. 19 and end Feb. 5.

The following locations will have open polls:

- George Brown College: Thursday, Feb. 5 : 10-12 a.m.; 2-4 p.m.; and 5-7 p.m.
- Casa Loma Campus: 146 Kendal Ave., Room E421,
- St. James Campus: 290 Adelaide St. Room 113

Voting will also take place at Humber College on Feb. 2, Centennial College on Feb. 3, Seneca College on Feb. 4.

For more information and poll locations and times at other colleges go to www.thecouncil.ca or http://www.georgebrown.ca/Admin/hr/labour_rel.aspx

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Take for instance this recent George Brown graduate, who could appear in a college ad. She has a good job with a big company. With a sleek, professional look and air of confidence she seems at home in her downtown office. But this grad, who understandably prefers to remain anonymous, plagiarized in college and even made some money helping others to do it too.

"I'm guilty of it myself. I didn't copy a whole paper but I added material I found on the web," she says.

Why present the work of others as your own? Why not, she says. "Even if you are caught the penalties aren't very severe – you might get a slap on the wrist but you can still pass the course and graduate." She even made \$30 by selling a report she wrote to someone taking the same course in a later semester.

"There's a lot of report recycling because profs give the same assignments year after year. The profs don't even notice." She remembers one student who was lured by the online essay mills that advertise around George Brown's campuses and bought a ready-made paper – but was found out and failed the assignment. "He was caught because he was an international student it was written so much better than his usual work."

A failing grade on an assignment isn't nearly enough to dissuade plagiarists, she says. "I think students who cheat should be automatically failed in that course."

Professor Pam Doyle has been combating what she sees as a rising tide of academic dishonesty for the last 26 years. Teaching a General Education course on film she used to assign a take-home essay, but started to find, by keeping copies of student work and doing Google searches, that more and more students would submit the work of others – either a just few paragraphs or whole essays. When confronted they would react in different ways.

"Sometimes they'd be embarrassed, sometimes they just shrugged their shoulders. One student said 'I thought it was worth a try' and walked away."

Now, to prevent cheating, students can prepare ahead of time and bring in a few notes but that essay is written in class. Doyle says she was probably catching more than half of the cheaters in her classes but not all profs, particularly part-time teachers, have the time or resources go to the same lengths.

President Anne Sado



Welcome to 2009. I hope everyone enjoyed a restful and rejuvenating holiday break, and that you are still feeling those positive effects as we

settle into the New Year and the start of a new academic semester.

As I reflected on the New Year over the holidays, I thought about resolutions – why we make them and why we keep or break them. Usually resolutions have a personal focus – losing weight, getting more exercise, or learning a new skill. The subject took on a new perspective for me, however, while catching up with my sons and discussing their ideas for the future. One just graduated from university last spring and is focused on career development in his first full-time job. The other is in his last year of high school and trying to understand his interests and strengths, and what might be important for the

future. I was reminded how tricky it can be for young adults to identify the most important skills for their chosen pathways.

Whenever I mention communication as the single most important skill in my career, people usually assume I am referring to how I have applied it in my management or executive roles. In fact, I am usually referring to its importance in the beginning of my career as an equipment engineer at Bell Canada. I found it was my ability to actively listen to the front line technicians that allowed me to learn the necessary technical skills to do my job well. For reasons both historical and practical, this gap between career skills perceived to be the most important and those that actually are, exists in all fields, and is something we must recognize and responsibly address as an educational institution.

In a recent employer survey commissioned by GBC in the fall, 80 per cent of employers across all sectors identi-

fied the most valued skills for new college or university graduates as interpersonal skills, teamwork, work ethic, customer service skills and oral communication – especially with people of different cultural backgrounds. This finding would appear to be a strong argument in favour of one specific set of skills over another, but such an assessment would be inaccurate, if not misleading.

In my experience, employers talk about valuing so-called “soft skills” because they perceive the hard skills as a given. The debate between the importance of hard and soft skills – although prevalent for decades – is actually moot, as employers are asking for these skills to be developed together. As a key component of the Academic Strategy all along, this approach already distinguishes GBC’s programs and is vital to delivering our promise of equipping our graduates with a full “tool kit” of skills to achieve their potential in the workplace and in their lives.

As part of the Academic Strategy, GBC has integrated “essential employability skills,” which include communication, information literacy and research skills, in programs across the divisions. We also established the General Education department for better coordination and focus. In partnership with our industry stakeholders, the College has implemented program standards to ensure that students are developing all of the skills that truly matter. With the rules of engagement in both work and society changing at an ever increasing pace, the value of such a blend of skills will only grow.

Ultimately, our role as educators only reaches up to a certain point. Students themselves must be taught to understand the concept of a full package of skills, and to be able to communicate this to employers. Combined with our own strengthening ability to develop such skills, we will ensure that George Brown graduates are truly candidates of first choice. This should be our resolution and one that we will keep as a commitment to our students.

United Way campaign beats target

George Brown has exceeded its United Way goal again and increased the number of donors.

The college 2008 campaign topped its \$160,000 goal – reaching \$163,925.62 by Dec. 19, 2008 with a record 27.2 per cent staff participation rate.

Campaign leaders thanked the 301 staff who made donations and said: “This campaign proves that we are not powerless, and that it is possible for us to make a difference in the lives of Torontonians. We are a part of this

great city, but there is always potential for improvement. By supporting the United Way, we are working together for the greater good and making this city a better place. Thank you again for all your support and hard work in making this a reality. Special thanks to all the ambassadors and those who spearheaded the special events. Without you, there would be no way.”

The United Way of Greater Toronto funds more than 600 social service agencies in the Toronto area.

GREEN SPOT

Save money and

help save the environment by bringing your own refillable container (aka a coffee cup) to Tim Horton's or Starbucks.

“Tim's” will take a dime off your coffee – which adds up more than \$20 bucks dollars a year for your average one-cup a day of Joe or Josephine. Starbucks will drop the price 20 cents.

The best part – not having to toss out 200 plus cups and plastic lids a year.



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